

Kurigasawa Baptist Church, November 30, 2025
First Advent - World Day of Prayer Service Sermon

“The descendant of Jesse, Christ” Isaiah 11:1-5
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Today marks the beginning of Advent in the church calendar. Advent comes from the Latin word “adventus,” a noun meaning ‘approach’ or “coming.” It is a watchword for the coming of the Savior. From today, we enter the four weeks of waiting for the birth of that Savior. The event of God’s Son coming into the world as Savior is indeed a message of great joy. Yet behind this event lay difficult circumstances that did not allow for unreserved joy—an adventure, an adventure brought about by God. Such was the case for Mary, who became the Savior’s mother. Prepared to face the rebuke and slander from the people of the world, she nevertheless threw herself into the promise of God’s word. For Mary, it was an adventure. Likewise, the wise men from the East left their homeland to worship the King of Israel. For them, it must have been a tremendous adventure. Christmas is the event of God becoming human. Yet this was no easy matter for God. For the Almighty God, the God of infinity, was to become limited. It meant becoming one who would bear death in his own body. Moreover, this earthly world to which God sent his Son was by no means a comfortable place for the Son of God. Nevertheless, God sent his own Son, Jesus, into this world. This is God’s adventure. We must take this seriously and rejoice in the salvation it has brought about.

Today’s reading from Isaiah 11 contains the well-known prophetic words: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse...” We will now sing Hymn 153, which begins with the line “From Jesse’s root, a shoot has sprung forth,” echoing Isaiah 11:1. This hymn originated in 15th-century Germany and is unusual among hymns for featuring the name of an Old Testament figure in its lyrics. Hymn 153 is truly a song for this season, Advent. Jesse was the name of David’s father. He worked as a shepherd in Bethlehem, a village outside Jerusalem. Jesse had eight sons. David was the eighth son, the youngest. Yet, to Jesse, his youngest son David was of little concern. Reading 1 Samuel, we hear the Lord’s words to Samuel, the man of God, as he sought a successor to King Saul: “I have found a man among the sons of Jesse who will be king.” So Samuel visited Jesse’s house and met his seven sons. Yet none of the seven met Samuel’s expectation. Samuel asked, “Are these all your sons?” Jesse replied, “There is still the youngest, but he is guarding the sheep.” To Jesse, David was a son not counted among his sons. But Samuel recognized David and anointed him. This David would become king of Israel after King Saul’s death, win battles against neighboring nations, and bring the Kingdom of Israel to its peak. This occurred around 1000 BC. During the reign of his son Solomon, the Temple was built in Jerusalem. Solomon would reach the peak of splendor. The term “root of Jesse” refers to the royal line descended from David.

Isaiah appeared in the late 700s BC, about 300 years after the time of King David. By then, Israel had split into northern and southern kingdoms, each opposed to the other. However, the great Assyrian empire of the Orient advanced militarily into Southwest Asia, into the region of Syria. The Northern Kingdom was destroyed by this military force, while the Southern Kingdom of Judah managed to survive only by paying a heavy tribute, that is, by offering gifts. Nevertheless, this Southern Kingdom of Judah was destroyed by the emerging Babylonian empire about 100 years later (587 BC). Then came the Babylonian Exile. Thus, the Kingdom of David, spanning over 400 years, was utterly destroyed, leaving no trace of either the Northern or Southern Kingdom. The “stump of Jesse” refers to the stump left after a great tree is cut down. After cutting down a large tree, a big stump remains, right? Back when King Solomon built the Temple, vast quantities of Lebanon cedar were cut down and transported to Jerusalem. It is said that after the cutting, the forests of Lebanon were left with nothing but a multitude of stumps. In the same way, Isaiah said that the kingdom established by David, the son of Jesse, would be left only as a pitiful stump. The stump of Jesse—that is, the kingdom of David—was cut down and destroyed.

However, in a sense, this might be said to have been God’s doing. For after the era of the judges, when Israel entered the era of the Kingdom, Israel became increasingly unfaithful. This is evident when you read the Book of Kings. The kings themselves began to engage in idol worship. Injustice became rampant, and the poor and the weak were abused. Though it did not surface during King David’s reign, the prophets repeatedly complained that the kings who followed him ran after idolatry, seeking profits, failing to do justice, and committing evil. Once the kingdom era began, Israel did not improve; it actually got worse. Therefore, it had to be cut down. Using the method of invasion by great powers, God struck this Kingdom of Israel, the kingdom descended from David’s bloodline. The destruction of the Kingdom of Israel by the great powers of Assyria and Babylon was a sign of God’s judgment. Through this, God sought to end Israel’s unbelief. Israel needed to be struck by God once.

But Isaiah says that if you look closely at this stump, you'll see a young shoot sprouting from it. This young shoot is called a "Hikobae" in Japanese. 'Hiko' means "grandchild." From a stump that seemed cut down and destroyed, a young shoot is sprouting, living a new generation. This young shoot, this Hikobae, contains hope and possibility for the future. The "original tree" was indeed cut down. Yet, even so, God's love for Israel has not vanished. God causes a new young shoot to sprout and to grow. This shoot must grow in a different way from the original tree and extend in a different direction. Isaiah declares that Jesus Christ is such Hikobae—the Messiah raised up by God as the new leader born from the line of David.

So, what kind of person is this Messiah specifically? That is described in verse 2 and following. He is a person filled with the Spirit of the Lord. Specifically, he is said to be filled with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, and the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. The first part introduces four spirits, and the latter part introduces two more. In other words, the initial "Spirit of the Lord" is further explained in six specific terms. These are the spirits of God that enable one to judge rightly against the injustice occurring in the world, to confront evil with wisdom and courage, and to fear and respect the Lord. That is, he is a person who knows the fear of God. In our prayer meeting, we are currently studying the Word from the Book of Exodus. Last week we read chapter 18. It describes the scene where Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came to Moses in the wilderness with his daughter Zipporah and his two grandsons. Moses was reunited with his family after a long time. However, the next day, Jethro saw Moses resolving problems among the Israelites by meeting each person in line, listening to everyone, and solving their issues. Jethro said: "Why do you handle things this way?" "This way, both the people and you will wear yourselves out." "Leave the minor issues to others; you handle the major ones." He said that if Moses shouldered everything himself, no amount of strength would be sufficient. Thus, a new person to act as Moses' substitute, a new leader for the people, was chosen. The foremost requirement for that leader was that he must be "a man who fears God." "Fearing God" does not mean "cowering in terror." Rather, it means "revering God as God." It means holding God in awe. The Bible states this is the foremost quality required of a leader. I believe the primary cause of the conflicts erupting around the world today is that the leaders of the nations initiating these wars have not become people who truly fear God. It seems they might even think of themselves as gods. But Isaiah declares the Messiah is not like that. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or hears with his ears, nor will he make decisions based solely on appearances.

The following verse states: "Administer justice for the weak, and defend the cause of the poor in the land." Trials must be conducted fairly from the outset, thereby realizing justice. Law is a rule established based on the concept of justice. However, in Isaiah's time, it was common for the powerful and wealthy to form factions or use their wealth to bribe witnesses, forcing them to give false testimony to secure favorable rulings. Those who suffered in court were always the socially weak and the poor. Yet Isaiah declares that the true Messiah is the one who will administer just judgment and defend fairly precisely for such weak ones.

Isaiah writes in the same chapter 9 that such a Messiah will be proclaimed "Prince of Peace." Peace is fundamentally realized under God's rule, achieved through humanity's reconciliation with God and with one another. In other words, peace is synchronized with the coming of God's kingdom. Though we did not read it today, verses 6 and following describe how the coming Messiah will bring peace not only to the human world but also to the natural world. "The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid; The calf and the lion will graze together, and a little child will lead them." This world where carnivores and herbivores grow together, eating grass, is truly a world without conflict, a utopia. However, the Bible teaches that in the original world of creation, where God's rule was fully established, humans and animals were not inherently in hostile relationships. The Bible teaches that it was human sin—the desire to be like God, to exalt one's name, to possess much, and to dominate—that brought about the conflicts and divisions in this world.

Such a Messiah has not yet appeared in the earthly world. Yet Isaiah prophesies that such a King will come as ruler over the entire world: "On my holy mountain no one will harm or destroy. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (verse 9). Isaiah declares, "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a flagstone for the whole people. It is a banner signifying the enemy and the friend in battle. When the Lord comes, all people will gather under this banner of Christ. In this sense, the Christmas event is a joyful announcement that the day of the true Savior's coming is now at hand.

I pray for you.